



March 5, 2009

A week's worth of floor debate

Greetings friends and neighbors,

We're now in week eight of the 2009 legislative session, which lasts 105 days. Today is day 53, so we're now just over halfway through. We've spent all week in the Senate chamber (we call it "the floor") voting on bills that have passed out of committee. **Tuesday alone, we voted on 39 bills!** Each time a new bill comes before the body, we get information about the bill only a few minutes in advance. I take the list of bill that are coming up and I look them up in my floor calendar, which is a thick yellow booklet that we get each day.

As I read the information about each bill, I make a decision about how I'll vote. Because I am a freshman legislator, I'll talk it over with other senators in case there's something in the bill that I may have overlooked. If you watch the floor sessions on www.TVW.org, you will often see two or three members huddled around in small groups. I like to call these "mini-caucuses." In these mini-caucuses, members and I discuss the bill thoroughly, and sometimes they show me things I may have not considered. These mini-caucuses have proven to be extremely beneficial for me, as they allow me to make informed decisions on each bill.

So far, we've been hearing a lot of "fluff" bills, which are bills that fairly non-controversial, feel-good bills that easily pass with bipartisan support. While I understand that these bills are important in their own right, I'm beginning to wonder when the majority party is planning on talking about the budget, which is, to coin a phrase, the donkey in the room that nobody will acknowledge.

You are no doubt aware that we're facing a budget shortfall of over \$1 billion for the current biennium, which ends June 30th. The state is also facing a projected budget deficit for

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the next biennium of more than \$8 billion, but **Republicans have found a solution that can be implemented now to reduce that number to a much more manageable \$1.5 billion.** First, the state will take in more revenue in 2009-11 than it did in 2007-09. That money can be used to pay down some of the deficit. Also, the governor already signed a bill into law that cuts the current budget, and we are in line to receive about \$3 billion from the federal government. After taking all that into account as well as freezing state spending at current levels, the shortfall drops to \$1.5 billion (which could be lowered further using \$700 million the state has in reserves) and smart budgeting can easily make up the difference.

Once the majority party recognizes that the problem isn't as insurmountable as they'd have the public believe, the Legislature can start making the right choices. First, we must make sure there are no new programs that cost money the state doesn't have. Next, we have to get back to basics and prioritize our spending by "wants" and "needs." Some of those "wants" that can be postponed include state employee pay raises, vendor increases, step-increases, and health benefit increases. The state also needs to cut back and reform programs that were started in the last four years, such as all-day kindergarten and health care coverage for families making 300% of the federal poverty level (which is nearly \$70,000 a year).



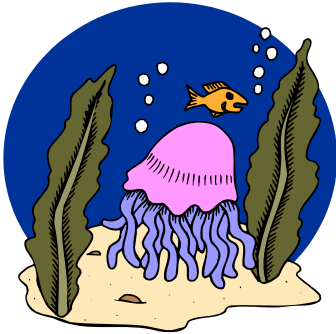
Rather than making massive cuts to vital programs and forcing taxpayers to "buy back" essential services by approving a tax increase referendum later this year, as some believe the majority part is planning to do, I believe legislators must rethink how the state delivers government services to keep the budget within available revenues so it can be balanced without raising your taxes. Whereas some in Olympia say we just can't do it, I say **"Yes We Can!"**

SB 5270 – Voter registration bill

One of the more controversial bills that I've voted on is [Senate Bill 5270](#), which allows a person to register to vote up to eight days before an election. To me, that sounds like an idea that's ripe for potential fraud. Some lawmakers make no secret of the fact they'd like to enact same-day voter registration, and I believe that this bill is a step in that direction.

I voted against this bill because **there are too many questions** as to the legitimacy of the voters who are registering at the last minute, and not enough time for the Secretary of State's office to answer those questions by confirming home addresses and verifying whether a person is even eligible. I think that you need to be cautious of bills like these, and know that I'll be voting against similar attempts to move election law in this direction.

Controlling saltwater algae



Another bill I voted against would take funding away from cleaning up the freshwater lakes in our neighborhoods and divert it to a fund meant to study “sea lettuce” algae in the Puget Sound. Right now, when homeowners register their boats with the state for use in area lakes, \$1 of that registration fee goes into an account that is used for the sole purpose of keeping the lake free of harmful algae. [Senate Bill 5412](#) would take 25-cents from that dollar and direct it to the saltwater

algae fund. I voted “no” mostly because **I want to know why there’s a surplus in the freshwater lake account.** I doubt that all the freshwater lakes in the state are completely clean, so I don’t believe we should be diverting taxpayer money away from its original purpose before accomplishing the goal we set for it in the first place.

A visit from Eatonville 7th graders

One of the best parts of my job as your state senator is meeting with constituents like you. **This week, I had the pleasure of a visit from a dynamic group of students from the Eatonville School District.** They were visiting the Legislature for the day, and I met them in the State Reception Room in the Legislative Building (the capitol). It was a real treat because the State Reception Room usually plays host to foreign dignitaries and various heads of state when they visit our capital. It’s wonderfully ornate decoration, from the century-old fireplace to the Victorian-era sofas to the marble pillars and high ceilings, makes it a prime location to host special guests.

Approximately 100 students came to visit, and after meeting them in the reception room I took them onto the Senate floor. After I took pictures with them at the Senate rostrum, we returned to the reception room for a question and answer session. They surprised me by reading a resolution that they had written in my honor! It was a most touching event to watch them read the resolution the same way we do every day here in the Legislature. **It was refreshing to hear such knowledgeable and informed questions!** I talked to them about being involved in state and local government, since that’s where the decisions are made that affect their daily lives. You have to get involved and participate and it’s never too early to start. I want to thank all of the 7th graders for making the trip. It was a real honor to meet with all of you and thank you for the resolution!



Sen. Randi Becker and Rep. Jim McCune with students from Eatonville Middle School.

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Sen. Randi Becker and Rep. Jim McCune with students from Eatonville Middle School.

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Sen. Randi Becker and Rep. Jim McCune with students from Eatonville Middle School.

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I'm listening to you

Since I've been in office, many of you have been sending me e-mails with your concerns. Each week, I'm going to feature a few of your e-mails to let you know more about what your friends and neighbors are working on and interested in. For example, Kurt in Yelm wrote to me about [House Bill 2264](#), which would restrict the sale of firearms at gun shows and events. Kurt believes that this bill *"would impose sweeping restrictions on our Second Amendment rights and set the stage for a ban on all private firearm sales in Washington State,"* and that *"it is a serious threat to our right to keep and bear arms and it must be stopped."*


Kurt, you can rest a little easier as that bill never made it out of committee over in the House. In fact, it never even got a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee. However should it have made it past the cutoff and to the Senate, **I would not have supported it.** Second Amendment rights are very important to me, both as a hunter and as an American. I believe in supporting all of the rights bestowed upon us by our Constitution, and I will oppose any attempt to restrict them.

In closing...

If you'd like to share your concerns with me or ask me a question, please feel free to send me an e-mail to becker.randi@leg.wa.gov. You can also visit my legislative website at www.SenateRepublicans.wa.gov/Becker, where you'll find a link to my [sponsored bills](#) where you can keep track of what I'm doing. **And please consider forwarding this e-mail to anyone you think might be interested in receiving it. Ask them to contact me so I can add them to my distribution list.**

I look forward to your comments and suggestions on these issues or anything else coming before the Legislature. My office phone number is (360) 786-7602, or you can write me at 115B Irv Newhouse Building, Olympia, WA 98504. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you in the Washington State Senate. It is truly an honor.

Sincerely,



Randi Becker
2nd District State Senator

